

Testimony By Margaret Drain

Thank you Mr. Chairman...members of the Subcommittee...Good afternoon.

My name is Margaret Drain. I am the Vice President for National Programming at WGBH, the public television station in Boston. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the value and importance of the Smithsonian museums for the work we do.

At WGBH we produce much of the programming that is seen on PBS, including the science series NOVA, the history documentary series American Experience, drama on Masterpiece Theatre and Mystery, investigative reporting on Frontline and the popular Antiques Roadshow. We also produce some of the best-known children's series, including Arthur, Zoom and Between the Lions, and accompanying websites for all these programs.

Our mission, to deliver educational programming that is free and available to all Americans, depends on our ability to gain access to a wide range of materials. And because of our role as a major documentary producer for PBS, that means documents, archival material and artifacts from museums and institutions throughout the country. For two series in particular, NOVA for science and American Experience for history, this access is their lifeblood. For them, access to the Smithsonian collections is critical. Over the years we have benefited enormously from access to the Smithsonian Museums. Our projects have taken us inside the Air and Space Museum, the Museum of American History, the Museum of the American Indian, the Museum of Natural History, the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Gallery of Art.

The Smithsonian's venture with Showtime raises the specter that our access to these public institutions may now be curtailed. If so, we may not be able to produce the programs that rely on key materials that are only available in the Smithsonian collection. I say "may not" because we do not understand the terms of the deal. It is unclear to us how public television is defined in this new arrangement; and we do not have a sense of what "incidental" use is. What we do know is that the resources of the Smithsonian should not be made exclusive to anyone.

For those of us producing for PBS, we take seriously our role as public educators. We recognize that our programs serve as a conduit for the American public to the resources of the Smithsonian. Very few citizens have the opportunity to visit, much less delve into these extraordinary collections. Our access is important not to satisfy the personal interest of a producer, but to address the public interest. To help you understand what's at stake, I'd like to offer several examples of programs that we would not be able to produce without materials from the Smithsonian.

In the area of science there's *Mystery of the First Americans*, which relied on substantial contributions from the Smithsonian and one of its prominent anthropologists. For another NOVA program, *America's Stone Age Explorers* we did several days of filming within the Natural History Museum. And *The Wright Brothers Flying Machine* simply could not have been made without the involvement of the senior curator of aeronautics at the National Air and Space Museum.

There are a host of American history documentaries that have drawn heavily on the Smithsonian collections, including *America's Great Transatlantic Cable*; *They Made America*, a four part series on innovation; *Victory in the Pacific*; a biography of Ulysses S. Grant; Ric Burns' seminal history of New York, and, the award-winning *Tupperware*, a distinctly American story which simply would not be possible to make, given what we understand to be the terms of the Showtime deal. The same is true for *Lost in the Grand Canyon*, the story of John Wesley Powell's exploration of the Colorado River.

But those are projects in the past. My concern is with the future. We are now embarking on a five-part series on the history of Native Americans called *We Shall Remain*. We made contact with the Smithsonian just days before the Showtime deal was announced. While curators and staff said they would love to work with us, they were not able to strike the formal relationship that we wanted. It will be a great loss to audiences, educators and students if we are not able to partner with the museum and tie into the many communities of interest we could mutually reach with the educational materials for this program.

And, what happens when NOVA goes ahead with plans for a special series on the history of aviation- will they be denied the access they need to the Smithsonian's Tom Crouch, our nation's foremost expert on aviation? Will the full story only be allowed to appear on Showtime On Demand, leaving NOVA's version of that period of history to be compromised, like a science textbook missing essential facts? Will the public not be able to see the story without paying their cable bill?

Let's remember that those who can tune in to Showtime On Demand is a fraction of those who can see these programs on public television; thousands - and that's being generous - as compared with millions.

What you should understand is that these programs are not just television shows. Television is just the first port of entry. We provide a long tail of material---educational outreach, web streaming, access to teachers guides on the web, AV use in schools. Our shows are used extensively throughout the country by students, teachers and parents as primary educational tools.

For the third year in a row, the nation's educators have chosen PBS as the top source of video in the classroom, according to an independent study. In fact, PBS is educators' favorite among all major TV providers, and WGBH productions rank at the top of teachers' lists.

Every program WGBH produces for PBS has a free, downloadable teachers' guide on the web. Right now, our teachers' guides are used by tens of thousands of teachers throughout the country every single year.

The exclusivity suggested by the Showtime deal flies in the face of ensuring that original, educationally rich material is available to teachers, students and the widest possible public.

As someone who has spent a great deal of my professional life working in the nonprofit world, I am sympathetic to the financial difficulties the Smithsonian Institution faces. The stewardship of non-profit institutions like WGBH whose mission is to educate the public, or in the case of the Smithsonian, "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge", grows more and more difficult in a time when federal dollars are tight and money from commercial interests is within our grasp.

I am not a purist. I understand that nonprofits must generate some revenue or they will perish. However, if in the process, we dilute the mission, we do so at our peril. The public knows and trusts the Smithsonian. Once lost, that trust, built over one hundred and sixty years, can never be regained.